

Narrowing The Gap



Economic Inequality

Employment Status of Disabled: High Rates of Unemployment

Of the 29,219,000 disabled people in the U.S., 17.1% were unemployed in 2014 according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). However, a large majority of the disabled are not participating in the labor force (neither employed nor unemployed). BLS estimates 8 in 10 of those who are disabled, or roughly 23,520,000 people, do not participate in the labor force. In comparison, [64.6%](#) of the general, non-disabled population were employed in 2014.

Disability affects many aspects of work including type of employment. For example, the disabled are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to work in management, professional, and related occupations (31% of disabled hold these types of positions compared to 39% of the general population). Wages in these job categories are typically higher than in other occupations further exacerbating gaps in income between the disabled versus the non-disabled.

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC we found the unemployment rate among people with disabilities (9.6%) was higher than the rate among those without disabilities (7.8%). It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of people with disabilities (84.4%) were not in the labor force and not included in these rates, compared to roughly a third (36.0%) of those without disabilities. There was also some variation in employment status by type of disability: 21.2% of individuals with cognitive disabilities (difficulty remembering or making decisions) were unemployed compared to 17.3% of those with difficulties walking or climbing stairs. The unemployment rate among individuals with severe disabilities that limited their ability to bathe or dress was 43.8%.

The [Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities](#) launched a new initiative in 2015, [NYC at Work](#), highlighting the contributions of people with disabilities to workforces. [Josh Levine](#), a COO of Equities Distribution for Barclays' Investment Bank, shared his story. He suffers from hearing loss, but talked about why it helps him do his job (he works on a trading floor and can block out noise so he can focus).

Justice Inequality

Lower Voter Turnout Rates for People With Disabilities

According to the [2015 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](#), in 2014, there were 39.7 million individuals living with disabilities, and 36.6 million voting-age individuals with disabilities, 1 out of 7 voting-age people.

There is a voter turnout gap between people with disabilities and those without disabilities. According to the [Disability, Voter Turnout, and Voting Difficulties in the 2012 Elections](#) report from Rutgers, those with disabilities are much less likely to vote in elections. Rutgers found a full 5.7 percentage point gap between voter turnout for the disabled compared to the general population.

The physical barriers imposed by some polling sites cannot be overlooked when ascertaining why disabled voter turnout is lower than the general public's. Rutgers reports that [30.1%](#) of disabled voters could not access their local polling site. This is in stark contrast to the 8.4% of voters without disabilities who had similar experiences.

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC we found the majority of voting places in NYC are not wheelchair accessible. In the November 2014 general election, out of 62 sites visited by the [Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York](#), 43 sites (69.2%) had barriers to accessibility, including inadequate ramps (16.1%), exterior signage (14.5%), entryways/pathways (40.3%), interior signage (8.1%), and interior access (35.5%). Only 19 sites (30.8%) had no barriers.

The lack of access to voting polls likely hampers the political empowerment of people with physical disabilities. In ISLG's public survey, 62.5% of people with a physical disability said they did not think they could influence government decision making, compared to 56.4% of those without a physical disability.

The [Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York](#), conducts on-going voting rights surveys and assessments of polling sites in order to determine their accessibility status. [Their newest survey](#), conducted after the general election of 2015, finds 88% of polling sites have barriers to accessibility, rendering them non-compliant with the ADA.

Narrowing The Gap, Volume 5, April 2016

In this issue of *Narrowing The Gap*, we focus on one of the groups adversely affected by inequality: **Individuals with a physical or intellectual disability**. Other issues will describe inequalities faced by children, immigrants, individuals currently in jail or on probation, individuals living in poverty, individuals with less than a high school diploma, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, seniors, single parents, and women.

Services Inequality

Adequate Transportation Impedes Disabled From Access To Important Services/Opportunities

Accessible transportation facilitates mobility and allows people with disabilities to access important services and opportunities (e.g. education, employment, health care, housing, and community life).

The [U.S. Department of Transportation](#) has reported that almost 6 million people with disabilities have difficulties accessing the transportation they need, and about 560,000 report never leaving their homes because of transportation problems.

Being homebound can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, which may manifest themselves in depression or other mental illnesses. [Depression](#) has been identified as the most common secondary condition of those with a physical disability.

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, public transit is the primary method by which people commute to work. About 75% of all commuters to/from Manhattan utilize public transit. However, the vast majority of public transit in NYC is not ADA accessible based on our 2015 NYC study.

92.2% of yellow medallion taxis and Boro (or green) taxis were not wheelchair accessible. Out of the 13,579 yellow taxis, 573 were wheelchair accessible, a total of only 4.2%; out of the 5,745 Boro taxis, 926 were wheelchair accessible, a total of 16.12%. In total, 95.8% of yellow taxis and 83.9% of Boro taxis were not accessible to people in wheelchairs.

The vast majority of subway stations within NYC (82.3%) are also not accessible to people in wheelchairs. Of the total 491 stations (469 in the NYC subway system and 22 in the Staten Island Railroad), only 83 in NYC and 4 in Staten Island are currently wheelchair accessible.

Education Inequality

Education and Students with Disabilities: Significant Gaps in Graduation Rates

According to the [U.S. Department of Education](#), 6,401,000 students, aged 3-21, in the U.S. were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2012. This translates into 12.9% of the school-age population receiving disability services.

While across the nation states are seeing record-setting high school graduation rates, [U.S. Department of Education](#) data suggests that students with disabilities are struggling to keep up. In 2013-14, 63.1% of students with a disability graduated compared with 82.3% of students without a disability.

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, almost two thirds (63.4%) of students with disabilities did not graduate within four years of entering high school compared to just under a third (30.6%) of students without disabilities. A sizeable minority of students with disabilities (15.8%) had dropped out, while 40.6% were still enrolled.

The drop-out rate was lower among students without disabilities (8.5%), as was the percentage of students still enrolled (21.2%). Looking at the previous year's cohort, 56.3% of students with and 34.4% of students without disabilities had not graduated within five years.

While NYC schools are bound to comply with the [American With Disabilities Act](#), a two-year federal investigation begun in 2013 found that 80% of the public elementary schools in NYC do not comply with it. [Six of the city's 32 school districts](#), which serve more than 50,000 students at the elementary school level, lack even one school fully accessible to those in wheelchairs.

[NYC](#) subsequently rejected the findings of the federal investigation, arguing that their findings letter contained few concrete examples and that there were problems with a number of their conclusions, but did agree to make some concessions. These included revising the Department of Education's website to make it easier to find accessible schools and prioritizing construction projects in school districts with the lowest number of accessible schools.



"It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision."

-Helen Keller

The Equality Indicators is a project of [the Institute for State and Local Governance \(ISLG\)](#) of the City University of New York.

The project measures progress towards greater equality across six themes related to **Economy, Education, Health, Housing, Justice, and Services** using 96 indicators. Each indicator is scored from 1 to 100, where 1 represents the most inequality and 100 the least inequality. For more information please visit our website at equalityindicators.org and follow us on twitter [@equalityISLG](https://twitter.com/equalityISLG)